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# The Reformed Journal

A PERIODICAL OF REFORMED COMMENT AND OPINION

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## Do We Dare to Use Modern English?

By J. J. LAMBERTS

## The Free Offer of the Gospel

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By GEORGE STOB

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SIRS:

Now that the Synod of 1956 is a thing of the past and more than six weeks have elapsed since then, the dust that has been raised in the various discussions has sufficiently settled, so that a fairly clear estimate can be made of the decisions taken at that meeting. The editor of *The Banner* has given us quite a detailed version of some of the discussions on major problems, which we surely appreciate.

One of the seemingly small but nevertheless interesting and significant sidelights on the discussions concerning the status of divorced and unmarried couples was the question whether these people were living in a relationship which should be called "continual" or "continuous." It was the Rev. Henry Verduin who suggested that the right word should be "continual."

According to the dictionary there is not a great deal of difference between the two words, though there is some. "Continual" means the continuous recurrence of the same action, while "continuous" refers to a condition which is going on without any break. The difference between the two can well be illustrated by an example from nature. If it should rain hard for a couple of hours the rain will drip from your house in a "continual" drip, drip, drip (unless you have gutters). If you have gutters, the rain comes down the leaden pipe in a "continuous" stream (without any break) as long as the rain lasts.

Applying this example from nature to the discussions mentioned, what word should be used? Is a second marriage after unbiblical divorce a "continual" relationship or is it a "continuous" relationship? The answer to this question will vary, depending entirely on one's point of view. And the point of view in turn is the

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DO WE DARE TO USE MODERN ENGLISH?
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THE FREE OFFER OF THE GOSPEL
Dr. James Daane, *Minister of the First Christian Reformed Church, Los Angeles, California.*

SYNOD 1956 ON THE LABOR QUESTION
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THE FOUNDATION OF AMERICAN FREEDOM
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NOTES AND LETTERS

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# Do We Dare to Use Modern English?

by J. J. Lamberts

THIS ARTICLE has to do with the language of ublic worship in particular, and in a more general ray with the idiom of the religious and religious-ype publications circulated within the Reformed ommunity. A number of articles have been pub-shed on this subject but the fruit has been negli-ible.

A few abstract considerations and qualifications t the beginning of this may clear the way for iore practical applications later on.

One of these considerations has to do with the ature of language itself. All of us are accustomed employing language and we use it with such xtraordinary facility that we almost never pause examine what we actually do when we speak or rite. Such examinations we relinquish to the nthropologists, and more particularly to the lin-uists. Ordinarily we think of language as having mply a communicative function, that is, it serves a medium for passing factual information from ne person to another. While this is important, it oes not by any means exhaust the functions of nguage. If we reflect for a moment we will be ble to call to mind scores of occasions when the nguage also told us some specific facts about the erson addressing us or writing to us. There were ays in which we were made aware that the other erson was male and not female, or the other way ound. We could often determine to within a few ears how old that person was. One of the oldest ts of linguistic sleight of hand consists of deter-ining by the language the geographical area or cation a person comes from (Judg. 12:5, 6; Matt. 3:73). And our schools assume that language abits follow social lines, for which reason they are mmitted to teaching a kind of uniform English hich nobody actually speaks but which bears the me "good English."

Now as a corollary of all this, we find that people ho wish to be identified with various groups will fect with varying degrees of accuracy the lan-uage of the people within that group. This is the ason that immigrants to the United States want so sperately to learn English at once. Recruits in e military service can be identified by their zeal mastering army slang.

As regards various church-related enterprises, ere is a kind of specialized language, or cant, hich aspirants to church office and often many ell-intentioned lay-folk use quite uncritically. One ears it in sermons and public prayers, he en-counters it in reports to and from ecclesiastical bodies, he reads it in denominational publications. Persons who have been schooled in other speech-ways are inclined to berate the users of this kind of utterance and to suggest that this noble instrument which is the English language can be put to more felicitous and profitable employment.

Before narrowing this to particulars, we will do well to note how this specialized language happened to come about. Various types of cant are common enough, particularly in professions where some advantage is attached to concealing this or that from the unwashed multitudes. Even college professors have been known to indulge in elaborate obscurantism now and then. And among cults, or quasi-religious organizations, like fraternal orders, this is practically universal. But one is astonished to find it in a church which affirms its belief in the priesthood of all believers. Here of all places the language should be utterly clear and it should be, as it was in the days of Paul and again of Luther and Tyndale, the language that ordinary people use and understand.

As it stands, the language of public worship is full of obscurities, ponderous archaisms and endless artificialities. To state it briefly, it is mischievous English. Nobody has deliberately undertaken to mutilate the English language, of course. This can be accomplished as well through neglect as through design.

TO PUT this language in its proper setting, we should look at the language of the Bible as it has come down to us. Just about ten centuries ago the story of the Pharisee and Publican looked like this — in the Anglo-Saxon Bible:

> Twegen men ferdon to sumum temple thæt hig hig gebædon; an Sundorhalga, and other manfull. Tha stod se Fariseus, and hine thus gebæd, God, ic the thancas do, fortham the ic ne eom swylce othre men, reaferas, unriht-wise, unriht-hæmeras, othe eac swylce thes manfulla; Ic fæste tuwa on wucan, ic sylle teothunge ealles thæs the ic hæbbe. Tha stod se manfulla feorran, and nolde furthun his eagan ahebban up to tham heofene, ac he beot his breost, and cwæth, God beo thu milde me, synfullum.

Four centuries later the Wycliffe translation was published. It looks fairly modern, simply because our archaic spelling happens to represent not the sounds of 1950, but those of the time of Caxton, the first English printer. Anyone living today finds it extremely difficult to understand the original pronunciation.

## Modern English? — Continued

> Tweye men stigeden in to the temple for to preie; oon a Pharise, and the tothir a pupplican. Forsothe the Farise stondinge, praiede anentis him silf thes thingis, seyinge, God, I do thankingis to thee, for I am not as othere men, raueynouris, vniust, auouters, as also this pupplican; I faste twyes in the woke, I gyue tythis of alle thingis whiche I haue in possessioun. And the pupplican stondinge a fer nolde nethir reyse the ygen to heuene, but smoot his brest, seyinge, God be mercyful to me, synnere.

In 1611 the so-called King James or Authorized version appeared. It made little effort to modernize the language of the Tyndale version, which had been published during the previous century. Here is the passage, in its original spelling:

> Two men went vp into the Temple to pray, the one a Pharisee, and the other a Publicane. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himselfe, God I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, vniust, adulterers, or euen as this Publicane. I fast twise in the weeke, I giue tithes of all that I possesse. And the Publicane standing afarre off, would not lift vp so much as his eyes vnto heauen: but smote vpon his breast, saying, God be mercifull to mee a sinner.

The Authorized Bible, we seldom realize, was actually rather out of date as soon as it was printed. One has merely to compare its language with the language of Shakespeare to realize that by 1600 the *-eth* endings of verbs had largely given way to *-s;* that *thee* and *thou* were rapidly going out of fashion in common speech (having hitherto been used to address intimate friends, social inferiors, children and household pets), that *unto* was practically dead, and that several other matters, including the form of the question, would have to be changed by and by. The translators fully expected to attend to these matters in a few decades when another translation would be forthcoming, but they had not counted on the accession of the Stuart kings, who were less than friendly toward Bible translation, or the Hanoverians, who scarcely spoke English at all. Once the climate of England again favored a revision, the language of the King James Bible had become crystallized as *the* language of worship and no one dared to break away from it. One has simply to note the timid language of the American Revised translation of 1901 and its synthetic Elizabethan English. And even the much praised Revised Standard version is essentially a compromise — an unrealistic hybrid of the language of 1500 and 1950. Now and then a translator tries consciously to break away and the result may be something like this:

> Two men went up to the temple to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee stood up and uttered this prayer to himself: "O God, I thank you that I am not like other men, greedy, dishonest, or adulterous, like that tax-collector. I fast two days in the week; I pay tithes on everything I get." But the tax-collector stood at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven, but struck his breast, and said, "O God, have mercy on a sinner like me!"

The Bible language is, of course, the startin point. Forms peculiar to the Bible translation use by the church presently get incorporated into th cant of the church. One thinks, for instance, c the standard term for a pastor's wife: "helpmeet or "helpmate." Anyone who has taken the troub to look up the origin of the expression in a goo dictionary will realize what complete nonsense it i

This is not primarily an argument for a ne translation of the Bible. But as long as the churc speaks in the language of Elizabeth I to peop living in the time of Elizabeth II, it never reall reaches its hearers.

IN SPITE of the formidable pressure of logic an common sense on the side of change, one finds t old defended by no fewer than three argument The first falls into a very common semantic err in supposing that reverence is an attribute of th language itself. It is absolutely inappropriate, it is argued, to address Almighty God as "you Such people fortify themselves with a show of pie and say, "Well, if young people really loved th Lord, they could learn this language." Those wh raise the argument are rarely consistent enough have learned Greek and Hebrew themselves in ord to read the Bible in the original.

The second argument may be called the "arg mentum ad inertiam," or sluggard's refuge. It said that revision is simply change for the sake change. We all realize that there are iconoclasts the world, that is, persons who are eager to tink with any institution that has achieved stabili Hence such an objection is not always easy counter. It must be shown that change is not on necessary, but salutary; that it will solve rath than create problems.

Still another argument — and by all odds t silliest, but that does not prevent God-fearing peo from getting misled by it — is that a revision the language of worship is basically un-Americ Several years ago when a new translation of t Bible appeared, some politician in Michigan tr to exploit it by the characteristic device of denou ing it as Communistic and introducing a law agai it. Here was either shameless naiveté or shamel hypocrisy.

But people are inclined to be suspicious of tra lations of the Bible as well of sermons which rendered in simple present-day English. The jection is that they do not sound reverent. Actua this means that such people are impressed by incantation quality of the language, something E White once wistfully referred to as "the long sw words with the holy sound." In all honesty s people should admit this and not go on pretend that they are being informed at the same time.

The American anthropologist Edward Sapir once put it this way: "There is another sense in which language is a socializer beyond its literal use as a means of communication. This is in the establishment of a rapport between the members of a physical group, such as a house party. It is not what is said that matters so much as that something is said."

Perhaps this is somewhat extreme. But it often does not matter greatly what is said, so long as it is said in the comfortable, reassuring, familiar language that one associates with public worship. How much more fitting it is for a minister to have a helpmeet than to have merely a wife. The absurd lengths to which this flight from intelligibility may go was rather interestingly illustrated by an advertisement which appeared several years ago in a denominational paper. It read: "On January 3, 1952, it behooved our heavenly Father to take our church building from us through fire." The theological implications of this are tantalizing, but the defect is obviously a matter of English. The crux is this word *behooved,* which means "it was necessary." The writer was obviously indulging in "pious-type" language in which meaning is sacrificed to effect and in this particular language *behoove* turns up rather often. It occurs for instance in "It behooves us to come unto Thee . . ." and the poor fellow assumed, not unreasonably, that it was a solemn way of saying "it pleases us."

In the denominational groups which entered the United States by way of another language than English there has been a kind of "cultural lag" since the linguistic acclimation had to proceed by two stages. First there was the transition from the foreign language to American church language, and finally from church-ese to more normal forms of the language. In this respect there is perhaps more of a latent expression of "not-belonging" than many of us are willing to admit. And if this is true, then the reluctance to accept a more modern idiom is pretty much in character with the "come ye out from among" sentiment which is in conflict with the other "go ye forth into."

WHEN WE teach people to write acceptable English the first essential is motivation. They must want very much to use this acceptable English. The rest is then relatively easy. Similarly those who have in their hands the affairs of the church must sense that they have been entrusted with the message of Almighty God and that this must be said as plainly as possible, not hidden under the bushel of an archaic language.

But in teaching acceptable English we also have to draw up lists of particulars to show students which specific unconventionalities they are using. So instructed, it is hoped that they will thenceforth mend their ways. In an analogous fashion we may also point out some of the less fortunate items in pulpit and press use and trust that a word to the wise will do.

Suppose we come back for just a moment to *thee* and *thou.* Historically *you* was used for more than one person (making "Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we thank Thee . . ." ungrammatical) and *thou* for just one. The King James Bible is consistent in this (cf. Matt. 5, 6). During the thirteenth and fourteenth century there rose in England the practice of addressing royalty as *you.* This courtesy was extended to more and more people until everyone was elegant, including children and small animals. General custom never did get around to according this dignity to God, and the result is that many people now consider *thou* to be a pronoun of respect. It is true, there is a problem here. In the RSV *thou* is used in prayers, and *you* elsewhere. In France the Roman Catholics address God as *vous* and the Protestants use *tu.* Many young people, one observes, seem to fall rather naturally into using *you* in their devotional services and even in public prayers so that there is hope that this may eventually solve itself. But it needs encouragement.

One could list many more strictly grammatical items. Some phrases seem to have become inextricably lodged in the language as elegant variations of essentially ordinary things. Why *now* should have become "this morning hour" or "the evening hour of this day," is puzzling, unless it is for effect. Some of the evangelical churches have abandoned these for "just now," which has the virtue of being shorter. Grammatically the same effect can be obtained by using the so-called present progressive of the verb. There are other washed-out phrases. We are not so materialistic as to enumerate results. They must be "fruits of one's labors." To say "gentlemen" has unpleasant overtones of what is called "the business world" or "the realm of commerce and industry." Accordingly other people are always "esteemed brethren."

And then there is the so-called passive voice which relieves the writer of saying *who* did this or that. The emphasis is always on the activity; rarely on the person or persons responsible for the activity.

It must be clear by this time that the problem of ecclesiastical cant or church "trade talk" is not a simple one. It cannot be remedied merely by injunctions against specific words or phrases or constructions. It is a complex state of mind.

As we suggested earlier, a specific type of language corresponds to a specific social group. We feel comfortable when we hear language most

## Modern English? — Continued

nearly like our own. A regional accent may be exotic or interesting, but we trust the people who talk like us. There is a hidden danger here, especially in matters of worship. Once we have this specialized language — this "religious-type" utterance — we easily take the next step by assuming that language conformity is to be equated with "belonging" in a spiritual sense, where it merely indicates "belonging" in an ethnic or a social sense. The result has been that a great deal of dreary twaddle and pointless platitude has passed for "sound Calvinistic preaching" simply because it was framed in the familiar language. And we have often been wary of sermons that were de livered in a more contemporary idiom.

Whether the state of mind or the language come first is difficult to say. Each influences the othe

Further speculation here can only raise painf questions — whether the essential unrealness c such language is basically a "retreat from actuality an unwillingness to face the facts of twentieth cen tury life. Why is it, on the other hand, that in thos linguistic islands within the Reformed denomina tions where pastors and laymen have departed fro the prescribed idiom one seems to perceive a slack ening of this ethnic tension? Perhaps some "di tinctiveness" may be lost, but the particular typ of distinctiveness affected may not be a serious los

# The Free Offer of the Gospel

by James Daane

A REPORT WAS PRESENTED to the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1948 by Professors John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse of Westminster Seminary. This report "with slight corrections in the interests of the gospel and Reformed theology" (front page) has lately been published and distributed under the title, *The Free Offer of the Gospel.*[1]

Accompanying the distributed free copies of *The Free Offer of the Gospel* was a letter from the Committee on Correspondence of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The letter was addressed to: The Ministers and Consistories of the Christian Reformed Church. It stated that the Committee on Correspondence was sending out these copies because it believed this booklet would help the Christian Reformed Church to understand the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and thus promote a good understanding between the two Churches.

The Christian Reformed churches could not in good conscience ignore ecumenical gestures of this kind. If she would, she would display an absence of ecumenical concern. Yet, if in this particular instance she shows little ecumenical concern, the fault can hardly be laid at her door, for the booklet hardly carries the ecumenical value it is made to appear to possess.

The booklet seems to have real ecumenical value because it was sent to the ministers and consistories of the Christian Reformed churches by the Orthodo Presbyterian Church's official Committee on Co respondence, and with the hope expressed that would promote a better understanding between th two Churches. Yet the facts are these: The repo of Murray and Stonehouse has never been official adopted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Th theology of *The Free Offer of the Gospel* is therefo *not* the official theology of this Church. I am n interested in judging the action of the Committ on Correspondence. I wish only to point out th the distribution of Murray and Stonehouse's th ology of the free offer of the gospel can hard be made to sustain the Committee's claim that stud of this booklet by the leadership of the Christia Reformed churches will give them a good unde standing of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

In spite of the fact that the authors' theology the free offer of the gospel does not have the offici sanction of their Church, the theology of *The Fr Offer of the Gospel* could have had considerab ecumenical value if it were representative of t theological leadership of that Church. But th is not the case. As is well known, there is radically different view of the free offer of t gospel taught at Westminster Seminary and tole ated by the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches. T most that can be said therefore is that the theolo of the free offer of the gospel offered by Murr and Stonehouse in this booklet is also tolerated both Seminary and Church.

1. Copies may be obtained from Lewis J. Grotenhuis, Belvidere Road, Phillipsburg, N. J., 25c per copy.

In the light of these facts it is clear that this booklet cannot sustain the hopes on which the Committee on Correspondence launched its distribution, for it cannot serve the purpose this Committee wants it to serve. Once these facts are understood, the theological value of *The Free Offer of the Gospel* remains the same, but its ecumenical value has greatly diminished. Indeed, the claim of the Committee tends to confuse rather than to promote a clearer understanding of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. If anything, the publication of this booklet points up the deep theological cleavage within the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on the matter of the free offer of the gospel, and as such may more than anything else help this Church to understand herself and her theological situation.

THE FREE OFFER OF THE GOSPEL is a fine, substantial study, marked by an uncommon precision of thought and expression. I am tempted to use the old salesline, "nowhere can you get so much for so little," for the price of the booklet tends to belie its value. It is worthy of study not only for its authentic scholarship and high readability, but because it is an exegetical study of a number of biblical passages which deal with a subject of particular interest to Reformed theology: the offer of salvation to every man. History has shown that Reformed theology can be, and has been, used to support the position that the gospel is *not* an offer of salvation to all who are addressed by it. Since some Reformed theologians have been tempted by the "analogy of faith" and by the "logical implications of Reformed theology" to deny that the gospel is a free offer of salvation to all who hear it, it is refreshing to observe the method employed by Murray and Stonehouse. The impression is inescapable that their first concern is to let the Bible speak. They do not want their theology to tell the Bible what it may say, but want rather to let the Bible say freely what it has to say. This is heartening. For all too often in the past Reformed theology has been allowed to play the role of censor, determining what the Bible may and may not say.

While their study was certainly not made in isolation from the whole theological discussion of the problem of the general offer of the gospel in Reformed circles during the past thirty years, the authors make no explicit reference to this discussion. No reference is made to the denial of the general offer of the gospel by Gordon Clark, or by Herman Hoeksema. Nor is any reference made to the conception of the general offer of their colleague at Westminster, Professor C. Van Til, found in his book, *Common Grace* (1947). Neither is any reference made to the Three Points of Common Grace adopted by the Christian Reformed churches in 1924. Although no such references are made, and although the terms "common grace" and "well-meant-offer" are not used, yet it is unmistakably clear that the position of Murray and Stonehouse stands in the theological tradition of the First Point of 1924, namely, that the gospel is a genuine, authentic offer of salvation to all who are addressed by it.

If I mistake not, the authors have put the case for the general offer of the gospel more sharply, more clearly, than has been done before. They assert, for example, that "it is absolutely and universally true that God does not delight in or desire the death of a wicked person. It is likewise absolutely and universally true that he delights in the repentance and life of that wicked person." God is said to "will," to "desire," to "delight in," the salvation of every man, including those who are reprobate. Furthermore, they urge that this divine will (desire) expressed in the gospel is "not simply the bare perceptive will of God," that is, is not merely the manner in which God's will and desire *appear or sound to us*. Rather this desire, or delight in the salvation of every man, is an expression of an actual, internal disposition of lovingkindness and favor within God himself. Furthermore, they repudiate the notion that the will to save expressed by Jesus, for example in his desire to gather the children of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chicks, is merely the human will of Christ. Nor are they afraid to say plainly that this divine will to save all is in fact opposed to what actually happens; their idea of sovereignty does not exclude the recognition of a divine will to an end that is not in fact actualized.

All these affirmations are, it must be said, made against the background of, and in full acceptance of a secret, hidden will of God regarding election and reprobation which is sovereignly realized. The authors take pains to affirm the reality of this hidden will of God repeatedly and throughout their discussion. It must also be said that the authors urge that the divine will to save all men is not to be defined apart from the demand of repentance and faith. On the contrary, this will to save all is a will to save them through faith and repentance. But they do not allow the hidden will of God, nor the will to save all men in and through faith and repentance, in the slightest degree to undercut the reality, or to deny the authentic validity, of the divine will expressed in the gospel to save all who hear the gospel.

SINCE the thoughts and words of the authors can be obtained readily and cheaply for twenty-five cents, it would be pointless to reproduce the

# Free Offer of the Gospel — Continued

exegetical discussion here. I shall, however, make a few comments on the exegetical discussion of one or two biblical passages, since they are, I think, of special interest.

The authors begin their discussion of biblical passages with a consideration of the last verses of Matthew 5. They urge rightly that the gifts of rain and sunshine are not merely good gifts, but that the giving of them expresses a lovingkindness and love within God toward those to whom they are given. This lovingkindness or love is said to be an integral part of the perfection of God. We may say it this way: because God is God, because he is the kind of God he in fact is, therefore God through rain and sunshine extends his love and favor to every man. They also urge, and again rightly, that God extends his favor and love through these gifts to the good *and to the evil,* to the just *and to the unjust, because God loves his enemies.* The authors have no sympathy with the positions that assert that God loves only the elect enemies, or that God loves sinful men only in so far as they are not-yet-sinful, or that God loves men as creatures, but not as sinners. Their position is rather that because God is what he is, he loves his enemies, and loves them even though they are enemies. In this they state the biblical position better than some adherents of 1924 have done in the past. It is, of course, true that God does not love his enemies *because* they are enemies. But the notion, which has sometimes been put forth in the past, that Jesus teaches that God loves them *as enemies,* that is, that God loves them less, or but little, because they are his enemies rather than his friends, finds no support in the exegesis of the authors. The whole variety of attempts to explain away God's love for sinners *as sinners* by limiting the objects of God's love by the insistence that God loves only elect sinners, or sinners in so far as they are not-yet-sinners (fully developed sinners), or loves sinners as creatures, but not as sinners, is regarded by Murray and Stonehouse as a misinterpretation of the plain teaching of Jesus. That they say plainly and explicitly that God loves his enemies as enemies, and sinners as sinners, is in the present Reformed theological scene of great value, for what is seriously imperiled in all the various attempts to deny that God loves sinners as sinners is nothing less than the biblical conception of grace which, as every theologian knows, is one of the most crucial categories of the gospel. When this category is distorted, the whole gospel suffers distortion. Was not the category of grace, more than any other, the issue of the Reformation? The authors have their finger on the very essence of grace when they assert, "And, of course, we must not think of this lovingkindness as conditioned upon a penitent attitude in the recipients. The lovingkindness rather is exercised towards them in their ungodly state. . ."

The author's forthright insistence that God's grace extends to sinners *as sinners* is as necessary as it is correct. In biblical thought both the nature of God's love and the nature of his grace are indicated by the fact that both are extended to sinners. It is precisely as a manifestation of *this* love and grace that Christ came to save not the righteous but sinners. Plain and obvious though this may be to the simple, unreflective, and unsophisticated Christian, it has frequently been lost from sight by theologians engaged in theological reflection. Blinded and led astray from the biblical truth of God's love and grace by the lure of theological reflection theologians have proposed to the Church that God's love and grace extend only to the elect *because they are righteous,* or to a sinner in so far as *he is not yet a sinner,* or to the sinner *but only in so far as he is a creature and not a sinner.* The result has been that in theologies built on these intellectual subtleties, the distinctively biblical conceptions of divine love and grace have been lost. More than one schism that has taken place within Reformed churches, and not a little of the unrest in both the field of theology and ethics, has been caused by this basic disagreement concerning the nature of grace. That the authors should insist that divine grace is for sinners *as sinners,* is in these days as necessary as it has been correct.

If the Orthodox Presbyterian churches, the Christian Reformed churches, the Protestant Reformed churches, the Orthodox Protestant Reformed churches, and the "Schilder" churches will face squarely and earnestly this question concerning the nature of grace, then each Church will get to know the other better, and there may result under God a purifying of rival theologies and systems of ethics and a healing of the wounds of our dividedness.

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One final comment. Of special interest, I think, is the author's discussion of Isaiah 45:22, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else." The authors assert that the salvation referred to is salvation in the fullest sense of the word. Further that it is absolutely universal in scope, not merely in the sense that some men in every nation, but that every man in every nation, is commanded to look to God to be saved. This unlimited universalism is said to be grounded in the fact that God, in the context, insists that he alone is God, he alone is Savior, and he is the only Creator. This last, namely, that God wills the salvation of every man

because he is the Creator of every man is of special interest. Here the doctrine of God's creational Fatherhood of every man is allowed its rightful place and function in theology: as a truth recognized as indispensable for a right understanding of the general free offer of the gospel. All too frequently for the health of Reformed theology, well-meaning defenders of the Reformed faith have denied, in theory or in practice, and sometimes in both, the truth of the creational Fatherhood of God of all men. With an uninformed anxiety to fight liberal theology, Reformed thinkers have sometimes denied this truth, thereby depriving Reformed theology of its rightful and needed biblical foundation, and leading it into watery mists of a false mysticism and into a vague, nebulous, and unearthly Anabaptism. The denial of the truth that God is the Creator-Father of all men, together with the consequent refusal to allow this truth to have its place and function in theology, is destructive of a genuine biblical theology. A theology of redemption, like the world itself, is bound to be a waste and void suspended over an abyss, unless grounded on creation.

I earnestly urge — more 'tis true for the theological than the ecumenical value — the study of this small twenty-seven page booklet of Professors John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse.

# Synod 1956 on the Labor Question

by George Stob

THE SYNOD of the Christian Reformed Church has always been under pressure to adopt resolutions favorable to a Christian labor association and prejudicial to existing labor unions such as CIO and AFL. In recent years this pressure has come for the most part from those associated with the CLA in the United States. As a result, Synod has several times passed resolutions urging our people to establish and promote definitely Christian organizations wherever possible.

Synod has not, however, yielded to pressures to adopt resolutions condemning membership in the so-called neutral unions. She has declared rather that "church membership and membership in so-called neutral labor unions are compatible." And in the last few years Synod has taken actions that were heartening to those who are members, by either necessity or choice, of CIO or AFL. In 1954 Synod refused to adopt a labor policy for denominational building which would exclude from consideration contractors who operated under contract with CIO or AFL (*Acts* 1954, Art. 146, pp. 87-89). And in 1955 Synod refused to sustain a protest against the nomination and election to the office of deacon of a church member who was a member of CIO (*Acts* 1955, Art. 134, pp. 91, 92).

The proponents of a more rigorous and absolutist stand on labor matters have been pretty persistent, however. Strong overtures have continued to come in to Synod asking for more and more rigorous declarations concerning labor union membership. New and larger pressures have come, especially from the Canadian churches.

One might have hoped that Synod, which has been making declarations and adopting resolutions since well before 1900, might stand somewhat on her dignity and refuse to accede to requests for more and more *"ipse dixits"* with which to hedge the churches and the workingmen. At one point it appeared that Synod might so act. Mr. Joseph Gritter, Secretary of the CLA, whose recent protests on labor matters were not sustained, asked Synod to explain her principles on labor union membership and her decision of 1947 as related to these principles. The Advisory Committee on Varia, to which this matter had been referred, recommended that Synod do not accede to this request, on the ground that "Synod does not issue explanation of its own principles but applies them only when concrete situations demand.

This quite proper and very excellent advice was tabled, however, so that consideration might first be given to the advice of the Committee on Protests and Appeals, which had under consideration overtures on labor union matters from three Canadian Classes. The Committee on Protests and Appeals came with advice quite different from that of the Committee on Varia, and in effect proposed that Synod *do* explain and comment on its own principles. This Advisory Committee presented a set of new resolutions on the labor union question formulated by itself, and recommended that they

be adopted as Synodical declarations. This, I am persuaded, was a very bad steer. But Synod followed it, and took action on the labor questions which seems to me to be neither proper nor profitable.

### Misapprehension of Advisory Function

The Advisory Committee on Protests and Appeals gave Synod a bad steer on the labor issue because the Committee itself took a bad turn. Instead of advising what action Synod should take with reference to the overtures given to it for study, the Advisory Committee constituted itself a study committee, and presented a set of its own resolutions — which were not those proposed by any of the overtures. This will become evident from an examination of the overtures and the Advisory Committee's "advice."

Three belated overtures on the labor union matter came to Synod and were put before the delegates in mimeographed form.* The matters proposed in these overtures were simple, clear, and forthright. Classis Hamilton overtured Synod to

> declare positively, clearly and unmistakably, that for our Christian laboring men who desire to recognize the Kingdom of Christ in the social sphere there is no proper place in the existing neutral labor unions, and therefore should be urged to join a Christian labor organization, wherever this is possible, or to make attempts to organize locals of Christian labor organizations, where they do not exist at present.

Classis Eastern Ontario overtured Synod

> to declare that a Christian who confesses Christ as King over all of life should not be a member of a so-called neutral labor organization.

Classis Chatham asked Synod to send a pastoral letter to every Consistory of the Christian Reformed Church, declaring:

> That the confession of the Kingship of Christ demands that every member must live in the light of God's Word, and that this calls forth the mandate to bring every practice in life in harmony with the Word of God. That this especially means that the members of our churches — since the anti-Christian forces are becoming more powerful than ever, and world conformity is increasing — shall do their utmost to establish Christian labor unions, or, where they are established to support them.

It was the business of the Advisory Committee, according to the rules, to summarize the substance of these overtures and to advise Synod with reference to the matters proposed by them. In view of the fact that studies had already been made, and clear resolutions had already been adopted by previous Synods, on the very things proposed by these three Classes, it should have been very easy for the Advisory Committee to judge and recommend whether Synod should accede to the requests of these Classes or not.

Instead the Advisory Committee chose to make its own study of the particular problem that bothered the three Classes, to study also the temper and spirit of the Canadian Classes in order to determine whether they might be satisfied with some resolutions other than and quite short of all they were asking for, and to try its hand at framing some resolutions that might perhaps meet the two kinds of thinking about labor unions that prevail within the Church. And so, the Advisory Committee gave no advice on the requests of the overtures of the Canadian Classes, but submitted as a substitute for what these Classes wanted a set of its own resolutions. These are the declarations prepared and proposed by the Advisory Committee:

1. Synod commends the Classes of Chatham, Hamilton and Eastern Ontario for their call for a strong and universal Christian witness in the field of labor and for the recognition of the kingship of Christ in all areas of life.
2. Synod declares that when in 1946 it affirmed that "church membership and membership in so-called neutral labor unions are compatible," it did not mean to suggest that membership in Christian or non-Christian unions is a matter of indifference, as is evident from the fact that in 1945 and again in 1946 Synod urged all our people "wherever possible to establish and promote definitely Christian organizations."
3. Synod encourages the formation of organized groups to study what in the contemporary situation is the Christian answer to concrete problems in the field of labor and to give a united, vital, and persistent testimony to Christian principles in this field.
4. Synod encourages the formation of Christian labor unions as instruments to apply the teachings of Scripture in the field of labor.
5. Although Synod recognizes that membership in so-called neutral unions is not necessarily incompatible with membership in the church, it nevertheless wishes to keep alive the awareness of the reality of the antithesis and reminds the members of the church that so-called neutral organizations often deny the Word of God, as is evident from the practice of many labor unions.
6. Synod exhorts such Christians as are members of a neutral labor union to be diligent in professing Christ and Christian principles within these unions.
7. Synod declares that these statements constitute an answer to the overture of Classes Eastern Ontario and Hamilton, and also when printed in the Acts, the Classis Chatham's request for a pastoral letter concerning this matter.

This presentation of a set of its own declarations by the Advisory Committee was improper and presumptuous. The fact that this is often done by Advisory Committees, and with impunity, does not reduce the gravity of this error. The Advisory Committee ignored its proper mandate and acted in

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* Strictly speaking, these overtures should not have been considered at all. There is a ruling which states: "Synod should not act on reports which have not appeared in the *Agenda*, nor on overtures which have not so appeared, except in urgent cases" (cf. *Acts* 1946, Art. 72, p. 35).

erms of a self-assumed mandate. It did not give ynod one word of advice concerning the matters roposed by the Canadian Classes. It simply usurped he place of these Classes and put before Synod a ubstitute "overture" that originated in and was ormulated by the Advisory Committee.

This was unfair to the Canadian Classes. Any verture placed before Synod by a classis is entitled o a reasoned answer of acceptance or rejection. nd the whole Church has a right and should want o know what Synod judges of any overture and hy. In this instance, however, the Canadian overires were not answered. They were simply supplanted. To be sure, after adopting the resolutions f the Advisory Committee, Synod also adopted the rther declaration "that these statements constiute an answer to the overture of Classes Eastern ntario and Hamilton, and . . . to Classis Chatham's equest for a pastoral letter." But not even a Synodical declaration can make a truth out of someing quite plainly contrary to fact.

This procedure was also unfair to the delegates f Synod, and therefore not in the best interests of he Church at large. The resolutions of the Advisry Committee constituted a body of new material laced before Synod, which the delegates could not dequately assess and evaluate for want of time and pportunity. Advisory Committees are appointed assist in judgment and formulation of judgment n already studied overtures. But who is to advise ynod concerning the new, unstudied material thus nproperly placed before Synod by an Advisory ommittee? There are Synodical rulings prohibitg consideration of overtures and study reports at have not appeared in the *Agenda*. By so much ore, new material presented by Advisory Comittees, as in this case, ought not to be acted on, nd should properly be declared out of order.

This kind of procedure by Advisory Committees as often added to and complicated the work of ynods. More unfortunate, and quite understandbly so, some of the poorest and least profitable of ynodical declarations are those which have been ewly drafted by Advisory Committees and adopted y a Synod which had no real occasion to consider em. It remains to be seen how much evil will come ut of these hastily-drawn and ill-considered decrations on the labor problem.

### Not to Issue But to Situation

Perhaps the root of the above-indicated difficulty that the Advisory Committee was more concerned address itself to the problem of the Canadian hurches than to the problem presented by the Canadian churches. The Advisory Committee's document was not an address to issue — the big question s to whether a Christian may be a member of a eutral union not even being discussed — but an attempt to offer something that might appease the Canadian Classes.

This will help to explain the highly questionable character of the first declaration, that "Synod commends the Classes of Chatham, Hamilton, and Eastern Ontario for their call for a strong and universal Christian witness in the field of labor and for the recognition of the kingship of Christ in all areas of life." What is the warrant for singling out these Classes for this high praise? Are they more concerned about "universal Christian witness" and "recognition of the kingship of Christ" than are other Classes? Is the particular view on labor union which they espouse more consistent with loyalty to Christ than the different views held by other churches and Classes? In the August 24 issue of *Calvinist-Contact* the Rev. John Gritter registers his resentment against the public statement of a Canadian minister, that "the majority in the Christian Reformed Church have never seen or do not any more see . . . that God's Word must be a light for the way, not only in the pulpit and in the home, but also in labor, politics, the press, etc." It is unfortunate that this resolution of the Advisory Committee tends to give comfort to this same derogatory thesis. This was not intended by the Advisory Commitee, to be sure. The first resolution was no doubt calculated to retain the good-will of the Canadian Classes in face of the fact that their request for an absolutist position on labor unions was to be ignored.

The remaining declarations give the same impression of being written not as necessary and significant ethical judgments on the labor question, but to appease the Canadian churches without unduly offending those who hold a different view of the Christian and labor unions. The declarations lean heavily, as the Canadian Classes would desire, toward the view that only Christian labor associations are a really Christian answer to the labor problem. The second declaration even goes so far as to reinterpret a former Synodical statement that "church membership and membership in so-called neutral labor unions are compatible" in such a way as to completely neutralize it. The second declaration tends to say that Synod will only "tolerate" such membership, but is persuaded that our people should be associated with definitely Christian organizations. This may please the Canadian churches, but it is playing fast and loose with the convictions of those who believe that "neutral" union membership can be quite consistent with a high sense of Christian calling.

In the third declaration there is a gesture toward objectivity, in the encouragement of "groups to study . . . the Christian answer to concrete problems in the field of labor." But this "study" is in large

## Synod on Labor Question — Continued

part already prejudiced by the following declaration that "Synod encourages the formation of Christian labor unions as instruments to apply the teachings of Scripture in the field of labor." The fifth declaration leans far forward to strike a mortal blow at "neutral" unions. To be sure, it is said that they are "not necessarily incompatible with membership in the church," but church members are urged to be aware of the "antithesis" — a word used here for effect, not for sense — and to remember that "neutral" unions often deny the Word of God."

But no one can successfully contend that the Advisory Committee's declarations are altogether one-sided. Even though Synod is not "indifferent about the kind of union her members join, and really wants them in Christian unions, and even though a sense of the "antithesis" should help one to see how often "neutral" organizations "deny the Word of God," Synod "exhorts such Christians as are members of a neutral labor union to be diligent in professing Christ and Christian principles within these unions."

The value and respectability of these declarations as a responsible address to the problem of the Christian and his labor relations is very low indeed. But they were probably not intended to be an adequate address to issue, but rather to help resolve ecclesiastical tensions occasioned by strong feelings in a segment of the Church.

The same kind of address to situation rather than to issue appeared in the Synodical debate on the proposed declarations. Canadian ministers expressed themselves as being highly pleased with these declarations, and pleaded their adoption among other things on the ground that they would do much for the peace of the Canadian churches. In an earlier session, when the Divorce question was under discussion, and a plea was made to postpone consideration of it for another year lest the peace of the church be jeopardized, one delegate observed that the argument about the "peace of the churches" was poor and unworthy, and expressed the hope that it would never be used on the floor of Synod again. But it was used, and apparently with approval, in the debate on the labor issue.

Quite astounding, on the same score, is the statement appearing in the overture of Classis Hamilton. This Classis asked "that Synod declare positively, clearly, and unmistakably" that for Christians "there is no proper place in the existing labor unions, and they therefore should be urged to join a Christian labor organization." Classis Hamilton did not believe "that this whole question should be considered primarily from a disciplinary angle." But, it indicated, the churches need a stateme "which shall recommend a similar line of action ar policy, which formerly was applied to the Christia school movement. Such a statement would le great support and very needed help to the Christia labor movement, especially in Canada."

This is an unfortunate approach to ethical pro lems in the Church of Jesus Christ. Consideratio of the truth of God's Word ought to be settled firs And if there are honest and unreasonable diffe ences, we ought as fellow-members in Christ to r spect each other's Christian convictions. It is har ly right to ask Synod for declarations which impo upon or prejudice the consciences of fellow-Chri tians, so that a segment of the church may be a peased, or so that a given economic movement m get "great support and very needed help."

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Let me finish this article with two brief observ tions:

First, I am persuaded that Synod is on the wro track when she officially recommends Christian l bor unions as the Christian answer to the lab problem. Synod must speak for all her membe and not only some, and she should respect the ho est consciences of all. There are some who belie that membership in "neutral" labor unions is pe missible and consistent with a loyal Christian li and witness. Unless Synod is willing to go all t way with Classis Hamilton and Eastern Ontario a declare such membership unChristian, she may r prejudice some of her members by giving offic sanction and support only to members of Christi labor unions.

Secondly, I devoutly wish that our Canadi brethren, whose Christian conviction and zeal I si cerely respect, would temper their zeal with a bit sympathy and consideration for those whose bac ground and experiences differ from theirs. We America have struggled with the labor union pro lem for nearly one hundred years. In our disc sions a great deal of consideration has already be given to the arguments now being advanced by o Canadian brethren. Perhaps we may hope that o Canadian people will not attempt to impose th judgments on the American as well as Canadi churches, until they have lived a bit more wid and deeply into our situation. They might, conce ably, come to recognize after all that separa Christian organization is not the only agency the exercise of Christian loyalty in social spher If they do not, they will be able to speak as th do now with more power and relevance.

But I hope to touch on these two matters a more when I address myself in a succeeding arti to the substance of the labor question.

# Pages From the Past

For the Centennial Year — a collection of contemporary accounts and documents which reflect something of the origins and the developing life of the Christian Reformed Church. Selected and edited by Dr. George Stob

## *The Immigrant Hollanders Find Ecclesiastical Fellowship in America*

The Holland immigrants who came to America in 1846 and following years attracted the attention of the Dutch Reformed Church in America. The Board of Domestic Missions of that Church was instructed to give them particular care, "with a view to bringing them into connection with our own church." In consequence, the Board of Domestic Missions commissioned Dr. I. N. Wyckoff, minister of the church in Albany, New York, and a faithful friend and helper to many of the immigrants, to visit the Holland colony "for this purpose."

Dr. Wyckoff made his visit to the colony in June 1849, and wrote up an extensive report to his Board with reference to this visit. The largest part of his report was reproduced in the *Report of the Board of Domestic Missions* of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, dated June 1850, pp. 11-17. This part of Dr. Wyckoff's report is given below.

Dr. Wyckoff showed himself an interested and capable observer and interpreter of the life of the Holland colony. His report is exceedingly interesting for the large amount of detail it gives concerning the life of the colony and its future prospects. Of particular interest is his analysis of their religious situation and character, and especially his statement of their fears with reference to church union. Since this part of Dr. Wyckoff's report assumed great prominence in later discussions and debates about the union with the Reformed Church, it is italicized in the report copied below.

### Dr. Wyckoff's Report — Excerpts

MY RECEPTION, as your messenger, by the colony, was almost literally with a shout of joy. There had been sorrow in the colony over many things, and not least over the fact, that the Dutch Church (which they had hoped would have received the poor immigrants, flying in poverty from persecution, with sympathizing hearts and open arms) had seemed to take almost no interest at all in them. With the exception of a few individual brethren, they mourned that the Dutch Church counted them strangers, and had no word of encouragement, no hand of help for them. The reaction, therefore, was electrical. To think that we at last felt for them, cared for them, were willing to help them, though late, shot through every heart, and there were many thanksgivings to God for this work of love, and many benedictions on the head of your representative.

It did not enter into my commission to examine their physical circumstances, and yet I doubt not, that both you and many others will be pleased to know some particulars of their locality, progress of settlement, and condition; and I am happy to be able to satisfy so just a curiosity, in a way that will gratify every benevolent heart. I arrived on Thursday evening, June 1st, 1849. My plan was to assemble the ministers on Saturday, make your overtures, and be ready to start for Wisconsin on Monday. But brother Van Raalte could not consent to so early a departure. First, the ministerial brethren could not be assembled till Monday, for expresses had to be sent for all. And second, I must see every settlement, in order to give a fair account. The appeal was so earnest and reasonable that I consented to remain.

The city of Holland with its environs contains 235 houses; Groningen, 30; Zealand, 175; Drenthe, 46; Vriesland, 69; Overyssel, 35; Graafschap, 50. In all about 630 houses, which, at an average of five souls to a house, will make the population over 3,000 souls. Some of the farms have two acres chopped and cleared, others five, and so on up to eighty; so that it may be fairly estimated that there are now three thousand acres cut and in progress of clearing.

The face of the country, which I had supposed was very flat, is pleasantly diversified with hill and valley, lake and stream. The streams are fed by large cranberry marshes, which, being themselves supplied by springs, send forth clear and healthy waters. I saw no lands which cannot be easily drained, so as to make them excellent for hay culture. It is a remarkable provision of nature, that along the several rivers of Michigan, there are broad tracts of natural meadow, affording abundance of pasture for summer, and hay for winter. If the character of the forest is a proper index of the quality of the land on which it grows, then the soil is of the most fruitful kind. The trees are wonderful to a dweller on the Hudson. Many and many an oak have I seen from two to three feet in diameter, straight as an arrow, and having from nine to twelve post-cuts of eight feet each, before you reach the limbs. There are thousands of white pines that will yield from two to three thousand

feet of clear inch boarding. I measured the stump of an oak five and a half feet in diameter. Three men (I being one) could only touch the tips of our fingers around an ancient sycamore. The most beautiful sugar maples grow on the heavy soils. Black walnut, and curled and bird's-eye maple and wild cherry trees, all of great dimensions, are plenty, and in many parts hemlocks of the most stately proportions. Wherever the land is sufficiently cultivated, the wheat is splendid, rank in growth, and rich in color. Potatoes and turnips of the best quality will be abundant this year, and probably also Indian corn. The prospects of agriculture are full of hope and promise. The heart of the people rejoices, amidst all their privations, in the mercy of God, which has given them such a goodly land, and such a great progress.

A most cheering fact further encourages the people. It was anticipated from the dark color of the water in the river and lake, indicating that it drained a soil deeply filled with vegetable matter, or flowing with much swamps of great depth, that the location would be unhealthy. In the first year that dark anticipation seemed considerably to be realized, for not a few sickened and some died. But just as soon as the people became properly housed, this fear entirely subsided, for directly the colonists enjoyed an unusual average of health. During my whole visit I did not see or hear of a sick person, and this fact is the more conclusive, as this spring has been uncommonly wet, and all the lower grounds have more or less surface water upon them. The early sickness was evidently owing, not to bad climate and air, but to exposure to the inclemency of the elements, and want of nourishing food.

I ought, perhaps, to mention in this connection, that the colony has uncommon natural advantages. There is a water power on the Black River driving two saw-mills, to which a grist-mill will soon be added, and at other points shingle and lath factories, and whatever else requires water power, may be added. And there is scarcely on the face of the whole earth a more beautiful harbor for all manner of vessels than Black Lake. It is about five miles long, and varies from a quarter to a mile and a half broad, and has a depth varying from seven feet within twenty feet of the city strand, to twenty, thirty, fifty, and even eighty feet. Like all the rivers on the eastern shore, its outlet is obstructed by the sandbars of Lake Michigan, but let a channel and a haven once be formed, and it is the general opinion of all disinterested persons, it will be the most desirable harbor and wintering place on all the western side of the peninsula.

For one thousand dollars, a pier and plank road of five hundred and sixty yards can be constructed, which will immediately increase the trade ten or one hundred fold. A corps of engineers of the General Government is now on the lake, making an exact topographical survey of the lake and water of Lake Michigan at its mouth. Colonel Bowes, the experienced and gentlemanly leader of the corps, spoke in the highest terms of the beauty and facilities of the lake and harbor.

An enterprising gentleman has just finished and set in operation a steam sawmill, that draws up its logs out of the lake, and is doing a good business. A company has constructed a wind saw-mill which operates well, and is capable, with an ordinary wind, of driving six saws. A tannery is in process of erection, which will find inexhaustible quantities of quercitron and hemlock bark in the neighborhood; and within the limits of the city is a shipyard, which will be prepared to build all kinds of craft, and the live oak for hulks and for plank, and the magnificent pines for masts and spars, are in sight on the shores of the lake.

FROM this description of the physical circumstances of the colony, I will turn to the direct object of your commission, which was to inquire into the religious and ecclesiastical relations of this people, to express to them the sympathy of our Church, to make an overture for Church relations, and to offer such aid in their straitness as might be necessary and desirable. To obtain this information Rev. Van Raalte deemed it would be expedient to assemble the ministers and the elders of the churches. Accordingly he dispatched letters and messengers to the several ministers and consistories, inviting them to a conference with me on Monday, June 4th. Quite a large company attended, and having opened the conference with prayer and a psalm, we spent nearly the whole day in giving and receiving information, and comparing ideas. From the assembled brethren I obtained the following facts and statistics. There are seven congregations and four ministers tacitly constituting the Classis of Holland:

| | *Families* | *Communicants* |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Church of Holland, Van Raalte | 225 | 250 |
| 2. Zealand, Vander Meulen | 174 | 225 |
| 3. Friesland, Ypma | 69 | 125 |
| 4. Overyssel, Bolks | 35 | 80 |
| 5. Graafschap | 50 | 100 |
| 6. Drenthe | 45 | 79 |
| 7. Groningen | 30 | 63 |

Five of these congregations have erected houses of worship. That of Zealand is forty-five by sixty feet, built of handsomely squared cedar logs, with a cupola and bell and is quite an ornamental building. The Holland house was first built, and was more hastily and less neatly constructed. The others are comfortable log houses.

Of all the communicants in these churches it may be said, they are praying and hopefully converted persons. Their religious habits are very strict and devout. They do all things with prayer and praise. They sing and pray in the morning, after their dinner, and after their supper. They pray when they meet for business. At a bee (or meeting for common work) they pray. The Common Council of the city opens its sittings with prayer. The appearance and tone of piety is purer and higher than anything I have ever seen, and seemed like the primitive Christians and most beautiful.

The colony is paying as much attention as possible to schools and Christian education. They have a Dutch school and an English school in the city; at Zealand a Dutch school, and will soon have an English one, and all the rest will follow. The teachers must be godly persons, who, besides teaching reading and writing, must see that the children are prepared on the Catechism, and that they are taught to sing the Psalms. The ministers catechize all the children once a week, and if they are hindered the elders take their place.

The pecuniary resources of the Church are very low. The funds of the people, which were very limited, have been exhausted in the purchase of land, and in making their improvements, private and public, until there is nothing left. The pastors have but little support, some of them literally none, from their churches. They have been obliged to struggle, and work, and suffer want, just as their people have done. But they live in faith and hope of better times. They rejoice that the Lord has kept them alive and given them joy over their flocks in the dark and untrodden wilderness.

*At the Classical meeting it was soon made known that the brethren were a little afraid of entering into ecclesiastical connection with us, although they believe in the union of brethren, and sigh for Christian sympathy and association. They have so felt to the quick the galling chain of ecclesiastical domination, and have seen with sorrow how exact organization, according to human rules, leads to formality on the one hand, and to the oppression of tender consciences on the other, that they hardly knew what to say. I protested, of course, that it was the farthest from our thoughts to bring them in bondage to men, or to exercise an ecclesiastical tyranny over them. And I stated that they would be most perfectly free, at any time they found an ecclesiastical connection opposed to their religious prosperity or enjoyment, to bid us a fraternal adieu, and be by themselves again.*

On comparison of doctrine, a perfect agreement with our standards was found. In the order of their churches, they believe each church and consistory should direct and manage its own concerns; and incline to the idea, that an appellate jurisdiction of superior judicatories is not so Scriptural as a kind of fraternal conference and advice. Each of their churches appoint as many elders as seem desirable, and they are always in office until they are dismissed as guilty and unworthy, or removed by death. As the result, they agreed, with these explanations, to join our Synod. It was deemed best, that they should not merge themselves into our existing Classis of Michigan, but unite as a separate Classis with our Northern Synod. They will, however, correspond by delegates with our Classis there. To this arrangement I saw no insuperable objection, and I would report the Classis of Holland accordingly.

On the subject of missionary aid, the brethren expressed most singular and honorable objections. They thought it seemed best, that the obligation of the churches to support them as pastors should not be impaired by the hope of foreign aid, and that until the churches were able suitably to take care of their pastors, they must suffer with their people. That they were all sadly poor was true, but they saw no example in the Scripture, in which a suffering church or people asked for aid, and therefore did not feel at liberty in their conscience to do it. But there was a precedent in the Scriptures, in which, when it was known that the churches of Judea suffered, other churches sent them supplies, not as by solicitation, but of brotherly love and bounty. If therefore our churches, knowing by this report how straitened they were, would, out of their love and sympathy, send a free gift to the colony, to be appropriated as the ministers and elders should deem the necessities of the saints demanded, they would receive and acknowledge it, with all gratitude in the Lord.

I felt that this was taking high and holy ground, and I hope it may be considered within the powers of the Missionary Board to meet their hallowed scruples in this matter. And whether the Board can do this or not, there is one form in which they can minister to the necessity of the immigrants, and in this form, I adventured to take the liberty to pledge for aid. There are scattering companies of Hollanders at Kalamazoo, Grandville, Grand Haven, Allegan, and a number of surrounding places, which the brethren in the colony endeavor to supply. But this supply is extremely inconvenient and laborious for them. For example, Allegan is thirty miles and Kalamazoo still further from the colony. The ministers have no horses, and to walk afoot thirty miles out, and preach three times on the Sabbath, is very exhausting work, when they must clamber their way often by blazed trees and along Indian trails. The brethren very much wished they had a missionary or itinerant brother, who should

have these small and scattered flocks under his sole care. I promised that as soon as they could call a suitable man, and report to you, you would put them on the footing of your most favored country missionaries. The Rev. Mr. Klein will come through New York. He has sacrificed much to this service. The Graafschap church to which he is called is struggling with difficulties. Any token of love from you, or the New York churches, to him will be very opportune. . . .

On the whole, I consider the Holland Colony in Michigan most wisely located in Divine Providence. There are many excellent men in the State, who cordially favor its interests. The State has enacted a law appropriating three thousand acres of land to make roads in the colony, and four thousand for the erection of a pier and other facilities for convenience. The Ministers and city council importuned me till I could not refuse to promise them, as soon as possible, to negotiate for them the loan of a thousand dollars on the whole property of the city, consisting of eleven contiguous eighty acre lots, for the purpose of building this pier. A spirit of brotherly kindness and philanthropy reigns among these colonists, which must be as acceptable before God as it is beautiful before men. A case will illustrate this. Two godly parents having six children both died, leaving no relations or support for their orphans. Immediately six families adopted each one of the orphans, to bring them up in all respects as their own, and one of these families (brother Van Raalte's) has six of its own. It is a most remarkable community, and God will sustain and bless it, and I feel that it will be a blessing and an honor to us to be his instruments in this matter.

In conclusion, if I have been more particular and prolix in this report than is usual, I think you will pardon me. I judge you wish not for generalities, but for particulars, and have endeavored to furnish them. My journey has been very fatiguing, but if you should have as much pleasure in hearing and ministering, as I have had in observing and detailing, we shall all be amply repaid for this effort of Christian benevolence.

*Respectfully submitted,*

I. N. WYCKOFF.

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After Wyckoff's departure another meeting of the ministers and elders of the Holland colony was held. Out of this came a written document, dated July 10, 1849, with the following title: *Principal Content of what was Transacted in a Gathering of the Preachers and some Elders of the Dutch Colony in Michigan, held on the 4th of June* 1849, *in Holland, Ottawa County, Michigan, and Occasioned by some questions of Investigation Proposed by Dr. Wyckoff of Albany, Delegated for that Purpose by the Synodical Meeting of the Reformed Church in North America.*

This document does not make mention of the fear and hesitancy with which the colonists responded to Dr. Wyckoff's proposal, nor of his statement that if they found the "ecclesiastical connection" unprofitable, they might bid "a fraternal adieu, and be by themselves again."

This document does state, however, that the colonists "seek" the closest possible union with the Church of God wherever it may be manifest on earth, if so be, that it knows and professes the way of salvation. How much more, then, do we feel at one with those churches which possess the same expression of faith, the same form of government, and the same liturgy which we possess, and which desire publicly to defend God's truth against the lie. We have never viewed ourselves otherwise than as part of the Dutch Reformed Church, and therefore we desire to live in fellowship with those churches and wish to send our delegates to their ecclesiastical assemblies" (Quoted in D. H. Kromminga, *The Christian Reformed Tradition,* p. 104.)

Further accounts, bearing directly upon the union accomplished with the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church will be given in the next issue of the *Journal.*

THE EDITORS *are pleased to announce that Dr. Henry Zylstra, one of their number, was appointed Visiting Professor of English and American Literature at the Free University of Amsterdam for the academic year* 1956-57. *Professor Zylstra accepted the appointment, was given leave of absence by the Calvin College authorities, and sailed for Europe on August* 23.

# The Foundation of American Freedom*

by Leonard Verduin

THE AUTHOR of this book, a naturalized American of English birth, is an elder in a Presbyterian Church. He speaks of himself as "a layman daring to trespass upon the field of the theologian and church historian." This is undue modesty on his part. Although Mr. Davies is a journalist by profession he is also a historian in his own right, having won honors at Oxford in the field of history.

The thesis which Davies puts forward in the present volume is that there is a causal connection between Calvinism and western freedom, specifically American freedom. He speaks in glowing terms of Calvinism as the main contributor to the success of the American try for human liberty. On some pages the book and the argument reminds of Dr. Abraham Kuyper's Stone Lectures — to which the author refers by name. Both studies undertake pretty much the same task in this matter; both are handicapped by the same built-in difficulty.

The readers of the *Journal* will want to know at the outset that the "Calvinism" of which our author is so enamored is not the Calvinism of Dordt. Davies does not like Dordt; he is bitter over Dordt. For him the theology that prevailed at the Great Synod was a horrid caricature of authentic Calvinism. The issue at Dordt, says Davies, was "the most speculative, questionable, and therefore necessarily controversial point in the whole Calvinistic theological system" (p. 110): "The Synod of Dort chose to honor the memory of their great leader by heeding him when he was at his worst. . . " (p. 111). At Dordt Calvinism "was on especially ugly display" (p. 13). The theological issue over which the Great Synod met is put on a line by Davies with the medieval speculation as to how many angels could dance on the point of a pin" (pp. 110f). Dordt spawned much evil, only evil. Dordt "has given us the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa and its fervent support of the policies of Boer nationalism and apartheid" (p. 112). Even the secularism of the 18th century, the very Enlightenment, was the logical outcome of Dordt, when "the seeds of unbelief which had been sowed at the Synod . . . produced a plentiful harvest" (p. 212). We owe our freedom, says this writer, not to the tradition that won out at Dordt but to that of the Remonstrants (p. 79). On page 113 Sebastion Castellio, the man with whom Calvin disagreed so vehemently, turns out to be more genuinely Calvinistic than Calvin himself!

Mervyn Davies knows full well that in his attempt to establish a causal connection between Calvinism and the development of American freedom he has undertaken a task that is far from easy. He is aware of the fact that "a strong case can be made against Calvin's right of primacy among America's founding fathers; no one can deny it." He is mindful of it that in his concept of government John Calvin was "thoroughly authoritarian," that he was "utterly opposed to what we call 'religious liberty,'" that he was "fiercely intolerant and earned for himself an unenviable reputation as a persecutor." Davies knows that it can be said that "the battle for religious liberty, wherever it was fought — in Holland, England, America — was won against the opposition primarily of Calvin's spiritual children" (p. 83). It is in the face of these and similar odds that Davies announces and defends his thesis.

MR. DAVIES' task is made difficult by what we called a "built-in difficulty," namely, by the fact that the primary sources cannot be quoted in defense of the thesis that is the burden of this book. One may not want to go so far as did a first-rate historian of our times when he wrote that "if Calvin ever wrote anything in defense of toleration it was a typographical error" — but an examination of Dr. Davies' documentation in this volume will show that he finds Calvin hardly ever quotable in the present assignment. Nor are the writings of first generation Calvinists more obliging. When, for example, one reads the Minutes of the Classes of the Calvinistic churches of the southern Netherlands in the late 16th century he sees that hardly a meeting was held without its resolution to petition the civil rulers "to eradicate the Catholic priests from the countryside." Nor were these measures taken for reasons of State in view of the current war with fanatically Catholic Spain — as we were taught once upon a time; similar measures were taken against the docile and politically helpless Anabaptists, and, as Dr. Kuyper has well said, "even Lutherans were barely to be tolerated." When one reads the *Oratio,* written in racy latin by none other than the Calvinist pioneer, Marnix, and intended to give guidance to the Emperor, Maximilian II, he discovers that he has in his hands as in-

*A review of the book with this title by A. Mervyn Davies, Abingdon Press, 1955.

## American Freedom — Continued

tolerant a pamphlet as any the most bigoted adviser of Philip II ever wrote. It instructs the Emperor, with a glance at Isaiah 49:23, that he is nursing the wrong infant, a bastard at that, *i.e.*, Catholicism. This nursling the Emperor must dash to the ground and then take to his bosom the legitimate suckling, that is, Protestantism. In connection with Revelation 17:16 the Emperor is told in this early Calvinist tract that it is his God-given duty "to strip naked the Great Whore, eat up her flesh, burn her to the ground." If the Emperor will do all this, so ends the harangue, then God will help him against the Turk.[1]

No, Mr. Davies knows that he cannot hang his argument on the writings, neither on those of Calvin nor on those of his followers. He must therefore seek another line of reasoning. The argument on which he rests his case is that in a day, when the whole theory on which the medieval order was built was being subverted by the introduction of that nihilism of which Niccolo Machiavelli was the prime exponent, it was Calvin and Calvinism that threw up a road-block against the chaos of competing state sovereignties and rival nationalisms that have been all but dominant in the Europe of post-Reformation times. "We shall completely fail to understand and evaluate John Calvin properly" says our author "unless we see him . . . as the antagonist, not of pontiff and priest but of the author of *Il Principe*. For if he made one contribution to the cause of freedom more important than any other, it was the fresh vigor and potency he gave to the ancient idea from which our whole western civilization sprang — namely, that God is the source and origin of government. . . . Calvin came to the defense of this idea on the very heels of Machiavelli's most deadly assault upon it" (p. 46f). This is the backbone of Davies' argument that Calvinism is the foundation of American freedom. As such Davies' argument reminds strongly of that of the men who coined the slogan "Tegen de revolutie het Evangelie."

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1. How men can write, as did Professor Henry J. Van Andel in a recent issue of the *Journal* (May 1956, p. 22) that "the Calvinists wanted liberty for all, and fought and died for it" is hard to understand. Not only were the early Dutch Calvinists opposed to the granting of liberty in their own country: they made it their business to obstruct it in other lands. They pressured the King of Poland to eradicate Catholicism in his realm; and when that enlightened ruler replied that he did not so construe his duty as king, the Dutch Calvinists were much chagrined. One of them has written on the margin of the official Classical report anent this correspondence (the handwriting seems to be that of Tileman Cupus) that "Dese Apostille schinet in den groont van Derick Voolckarts herte en schriften gesogen te sijn" (reference is to Coornhert). Such a policy seems far removed from contending for "liberty for all" and farther still from "dying for it."

BEFORE we get enthusiastic about Davie argument we wish to ask a few questions. Davi holds that what happened in America was *sui ge eris*, not of a piece with that which happened o the other side of the Atlantic. He says that "th principal aim of this book is to lay bare afresh . . why it was that the men of France of 1789 — an of the liberals of Europe who followed them — failed, while the men of America achieved such magnificent success." But Davies does not explai how it was that Calvin's anti-Machiavellianism wa so much more effective in America than in Europe Church membership stood at a lower figure in th America of Revolutionary times than it did in th Europe of those days. There were admirers of th Encyclopedists enough among the founding father We feel that America was not sufficiently differen at the point where Davies locates the point of di ference.

The present reviewer would agree with our autho that America was indeed *sui generis;* but he is in clined to locate the difference in another area. H feels that America's differentness consisted of thi that on these shores the medieval notion of th parochial-church was effectively overcome and th idea of the gathered-church put in its place. Thi was America's new departure. And it, more tha any other one thing, accounts for the "magnificen success" to which Mr. Davies has rightly called a tention. Wherever the medieval idea of the pa rochial-church lingers, there establishment with a its attendant evils stands in the way of freedom a it is conceived of in the United States; wherever th parochial-church idea is rejected there the stage ha been set for freedom and toleration.

Happily, Mr. Davies is not, as is the case so com monly with many admirers of Calvin and Calvinism completely blind to the contribution of that tribu tary to the river of American freedom of which w have just now spoken. He knows that it was th proponents of the gathered-church that "fought t victory the battle for religious liberty"; he treat with due respect the argument that "since it wa this victory which made American freedom possible these sects should be considered the true begetter of America." He knows that it can be said tha "the palm of paternity goes to Roger Williams *e al.*" Davies is well enough abreast of modern re search to say that it was the despised Anabaptist that "supplied Calvinism with the ingredient of th concept of the church as a community of convince believers." He grants that it was the Levellers wh "stood for total separation of Church and State complete democracy in both, full liberty of con science, universal suffrage, the rights of man . . . and as such were the offspring of the 'gathere church' idea" and that "it was largely from th

English sects that the Brownists had derived it" (pp. 160f).[2]

It is undeniable that as to this issue Calvin left matters not only unsolved but also unanalyzed. He straddled the fence so that both schools of thought can quote him. Mr. Davies suggests that "it was the smallness of the Genevan community that concealed from view the incompatibility of the parochial and the gathered-church ideas" and he considers it "interesting to speculate which of them Calvin would have retained if he had had to organize a church for, say, his native land of France." One searches in vain in Calvin's writings for a clear analysis of this problem. For that you must turn to the record, too often written in blood, of the Anabaptists and their ilk.

IT IS A significant fact, and one quite pertinent in this matter, that the Pilgrim Fathers, who were so largely the pioneers for America's freedom, left Holland with so little regret and showed so little nostalgia later for "the little kingdom by the sea." The theology of Calvin which they encountered there they took with them to the New World and they continued long after to speak with the greatest respect for his system of theology. But they were keenly aware that in the matter of freedom they were moving forward and beyond the Calvinism of Europe. The words uttered in a pastoral farewell by that saintly man of God, John Robinson, were as prophetic as farewell sentiments frequently are: "I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the Reformed churches, who are come to a period in religion, unwilling to go farther than the instruments of reformation (have gone). . . The Calvinists, as you see, stick fast where they have been left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. . . . I beseech you, remember it as an article of your church-covenant, that you be ready to receive whatever truth shall be made known to you from the written word of God." The ensuing context indicates that John Robinson was thinking of new light in the matter of the integration of religion and public life.

The new light of which Robinson spoke has come; it has been captured in the First Amendment of the Constitution. The sole purpose of this Amendment was to make the parochial-church a thing of the past; and this in turn implied that all churches would have to fall into the pattern of the gathered-church. Even the Catholic Church has had to adjust itself to the new light; and this adjustment has made American Catholicism more nearly tolerant than it is anywhere else. The new light provides religion with a maximum opportunity to influence public life. But it requires of religion to do this by what may be called the percolator method. As a result America does not have any political parties organized along lines of religion. There are no "Catholic" seats in our Congress. To date we have had no native Labor Unions organized along religious lines. Non-Americans think this signifies a sell-out to unbelief; but it was not intended as such, and, it has not worked out that way.

Wherever the gathered-church idea was embraced and the parochial-church idea overcome there freedom has blossomed. Wherever this changeover from medieval times was obstructed there freedom was choked in its cradle. It is significant, and sad, that Germany, the land within the confines of which the assault upon the parochial-church pattern was primarily launched, has made the poorest showing in the development of freedom and that ascription of the importance of the exercise of option that is so much a part of the America we know and love — the Germany that made the cleanest sweep of its Anabaptists, drove them out of the land to foreign shores where they continued their agitation, and, not without significant success.

Davies' book is an excellent study in the origins of American freedom, even if it hangs too much, as this reviewer sees it, on one peg and not enough on another.


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2. Prof. Van Andel also complains (*loc. cit.*) that "Rev. Verduin tries to prove that not the Calvinists, but the Anabaptists were the real defenders of a free church!" We are pleased to note that Mervyn Davies also realizes that the idea of the gathered-church is an Anabaptist legacy. Our worthy critic then repeats the legend that "the first Anabaptists were mostly antinomians and revolutionary rebels, according to the books and documents of their own leaders." Unfortunately Professor Van Andel does not specify which books and documents he has in mind. The charge that the Anabaptists were "mostly antinomians" is indeed very strange; contemporary Reformed polemists accused the Anabaptists the rather of leaning too heavily upon good works and the keeping of the commandments, called them "werckheiligen" and "hemelstormers."

## Notes and Letters . . .

(*Continued from page 2*)

result of what marriage is considered to be.

The "official" position of the Christian Reformed Church since 1947 till the Synod just past was that a couple thus in second marriage were living in an adulterous relationship and could not become members of the Church (though repentant of the sins committed) unless they refrained from sexual intercourse. The fundamental background of this stand is that marriage is considered to be the *union of two bodies,* male and female, and that the sin of the second marriage consisted of the bodily intercourse only, for it was held that refraining from the intimate relationship would essentially cut the marriage tie (without formally doing so) and that such abstinence would clear their position before God and the Church. Therefore all who took or take that position and who hold the holy bond of marriage in such *carnal* esteem must necessarily use the phrase, living in *continual adultery,* bodily intercourse not being continuous, but continual (a succession of periodical acts).

They also believed that the total abstinence from sexual relations was a necessary and essential proof of repentance, another indication of the theory that the sin committed in contracting a second marriage consisted only in the "becoming one flesh". This opinion is related to the false assumption that a perfectly legitimate relationship (such as marriage is) when begun in sin, thereby becomes and *ever remains* a sinful relationship. This is neither Scriptural nor logical reasoning.

For those who hold that marriage is a *union of two persons,* male and female, the relationship of husband and wife becomes in the first place a legal bond, which includes all the duties and privileges connected with the marriage relationship. They can only speak of a *continuous relationship,* because the relation of husband and wife is and remains a permanent one until death of one of its members, except it be arbitrarily cut by the sinful hand of man in asking for and obtaining a divorce. For those who esteem marriage thus as a union of two persons, the former stand of the Church (demanding separation) had no meaning because that demand had only reference to a certain pact of the union, though a very prominent one, but not to the union itself. In all matters except the ecclesiastical they would still be considered a married couple. The essence of wedlock being a legal one, it was not broken by a forced or voluntary abstaining from bodily intercourse.

It therefore proves that the apparently slight difference between the two words is rooted in the extremely important qualification of what marriage is considered to be: the joining of two bodies, or the joining of two persons (soul and body).

One more afterthought I wish to mention in connection with this serious problem. It is rather strange that the applied basic laws in civil justice are the very opposite of the basic laws in ecclesiastical justice. In the civil courts a person is held to be innocent until proven guilty. In the ecclesiastical courts of the Christian Reformed Church for the last 50 years a person was held to be guilty until proven innocent.

And now the Synod of 1956 has admitted (some members no doubt reluctantly) that there is no Scriptural proof for the continuous adultery charge nor for the separation demands. (Art. 1 and 2 of the final decisions). These conclusions however are entirely negative in character and are only reached by way of elimination.

Is it not strange that while there is no expressed text in Scripture to define this question, the decision for *guilt* (of continuing the marriage) has always had the right of way in the official position of the Church? Would not the opposite view have the same right of opinion and even more so, if the spirit of the gospel is taken in consideration, seeing that the much more abounding grace of God far exceeds abandoning sin?

What I consider a weakness in the 1956 synodical conclusions in this most serious and important matter is that apparently no one even tried to prove from the revelation of Scripture that a legal marriage is essentially and judiciously a *marriage* including all family relations and *therefore cannot be* a continual living in adultery.

But that point can be taken up some other time.

Peter L. Van Dyken
*Ripon, California*

## *That Cecil De Boer Volume*

Some *Journal* readers will recall that in a commemorative article on the late Dr. Cecil De Boer in the January issue I invited all those who would care to see Dr. De Boer's articles collected in book form to write in and say so. I promised that if the response to that invitation were good I would edit the copy and approach a publisher.

The response was good, and it is a pleasure to me now to be able to announce that Cecil De Boer's published articles, for the most part published originally in the *Calvin Forum,* will be issued late this year by the Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Those who have already indicated an interest will receive the volume immediately upon publication. Those who wanted to express their interest, but neglected to do so, would do well to reserve their copy by writing the publishers now (255 Jefferson, S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich.). The title of this important Reformed statement of the role of the Christian in a secular society will be *Responsible Protestantism.*

It has been a pleasure to serve as the representative of Dr. De Boer's friends and readers in preparing the text for publication. In my judgment the book sets some of the major issues of faith and life in fine perspective for Reformed readers.

HENRY ZYLSTRA

SIRS:

We hope that no one will regard this comment on the article of Dr. G. Stob appearing in the last issue of *The Reformed Journal* entitled "Open Door for All Sinners" as an attempt to safeguard our honor considering the supposed overwhelming defeat which we suffered as belonging to the committee on Divorce and Remarriage. Our interest and zeal for the truth ought to lie deeper than the desire to be the victor in a debate. If Synod has come closer to the truth in its decisions on this question, may God enable us to swallow our pride and magnify Him for His guidance. Frankly, this is not difficult for us to do. For that reason it has not been difficult to read brother Stob's article with a spirit of appreciation and kindly interest.

It has always been our contention that the divorce problem is a very complicated one. There is something very elusive about it. One thinks that he has finally seen the light and suddenly all grows very dark again. One is inclined at times to agree with those who have attacked the traditional stand of the church when they call the supporters of that stand Pharisaical, cold, legalistic, without the spirit of Christ. Struggle and prayer follow. Freeing oneself from prejudice, fear, and pride, renewed study is begun. To maintain conviction and yet to keep an open mind is not easy. One goes to Synod hoping by God's grace to do just that. Remember, it is truth that we must labor for. At Synod the battle is on. Motives are questioned, suspicions arise. In the midst of the conflict a world of sin is at work and yet God's Holy Spirit is enough to guide. One weighs all factors. The vote is finally taken. The issue is decided. Some loudly claim that the light has dawned and the problem is solved. God's name is glorified and praised. Men go home and think and ponder. Some return home and begin to write and to evaluate. Dr. Stob is one who writes. We pick up the article and read and study and discuss. How does he understand the decision of Synod on the divorce question? We read; we analyze; we are perplexed. Just what did the Synod decide? And how are we to interpret it? Is the divorce problem solved? Has Synod spoken finally and conclusively on the issue? Has the light really dawned and confusion been dispelled? Upon further reflection we fear that maybe things are growing dark again and that victory has once more eluded us.

All this disturbance arises from the following statement in Dr. Stob's article: "It is the basic judgment of the new position that such repentance and turning is possible within the relations of the second marriage, and indeed, that such repentance and turning must occur in that relationship. The marriage begun in sin must, by the commitment of the whole of its life to the Lord Jesus Christ, be made a holy marriage in the Lord. Such a transformation of a marriage begun in sin is possible precisely because the grace of Christ can enter into a sinful relationship — even as the grace of Christ can enter into a sinful heart and life — and transform it into what is holy and renewed in the love of God." Now we are ready to acknowledge that this is beautifully stated and that there is something here that merits serious consideration. It might possibly be that we are on the right track out of our difficulties if the decision of Synod is statedly so interpreted. That is, if we understand Dr. G. Stob correctly.

However, the decision of Synod is not by declaration so interpreted. Fact is, there are other interpretations of the decision of Synod. Dr. George Stob has no right to assume that his interpretation is the only, commonly accepted, inescapable one. Until Synod interprets and plainly delineates the implications of its new stand, together with sound exegetical proof, confusion will reign. All that Synod has declared is simply this, whenever the church is confronted with parties of a second unbiblical marriage who manifest true repentance, there is not conclusive evidence in Scripture to demand that they separate before the church can accept them. What constitutes true re-

(*Continued on page* 22)


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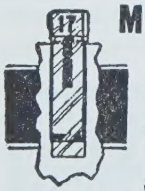

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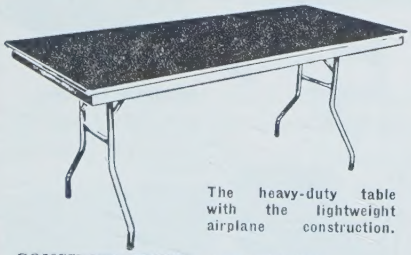

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# Notes and Letters . . .

(*Continued from page* 21)

pentance in such cases is not stated. Precisely what the nature of the sin is in which they were or are involved and respecting which there is to be repentance remains without clarification. Just what finally justifies a marriage begun in sin is open for debate.

To illustrate what we mean, let us look at two possible approaches to this matter. There are those who maintain that when a second marriage on unbiblical grounds is contracted, the only sin involved is the act of marrying. A man who courts another woman is committing adultery. He has no right to have relations with her. No minister could perform the marriage of said party to this woman. But the marriage is contracted anyway, in spite of warnings, perhaps, and performed by a civil authority. That marrying was a sinful deed. But thereafter the marriage is acceptable. There is no sinful relationship. All that can be said is that the shadow of adultery is cast over this marriage. If said parties confess their sin of breaking a previous marriage and contracting a new one, forgiveness follows and the marriage, which in itself was acceptable, continues.

Those who hold to this view are inclined to oppose the immediate excommunication of a man who, having divorced his first wife on unbiblical grounds, has contracted a new marriage. The church, which has counselled this man all along, must work for repentance. If repentance is evident, be it only after a few months, discipline ends upon confession. The new marriage, begun in sin, not only may stand; it must stand.

Before proceeding to the second possible approach to the whole question, allow us to state that we find it extremely difficult to acquiesce in the above mentioned position. If it is true that there is not substantial, conclusive proof in Scripture to maintain that such a marriage is a continual living in adultery, is it true that Scripture says nothing at all to suggest and maintain that there is something radically wrong in such a marriage? Is it clearly inferred fro Scripture that just the act wrong — nothing more? Wi that we cannot as yet agree. Rat er we stand opposed to such a p stion.

Now it could be that Dr. Stob agrees wholeheartedly wi the above mentioned positio Perhaps, in his mind, there nothing stated in the articl "Open Doors For All Sinners which is in conflict therewith. W do not look at it that way, hov ever. Studying and reading it ov and over, we are convinced th Dr. G. Stob's position is differen And he believes this to be Synod position. The marriage begun i sin constitutes a sinful relatio ship. Only the renewing grace c Christ, revealed in the whole c the life of this marriage, can trans form this sinful relationship int a holy one.

To make sure that we under stood Dr. G. Stob correctly, w thought of other possible situa tions in which this would appl with an altogether different mean ing than what we were takin from it or putting into it. Con sider, for example, what we ter a forced marriage. One migh hold that it is begun in sin an thus constitutes a sinful relatio ship until repentance is manifes and then this marriage begun i sin is transformed by grace int holy matrimony. But this is hard ly true. To have sexual relation out of wedlock is sin. And whe it results in a young couple being confronted with the necessity o marriage, the marriage which i then contracted, free-willingly, i which vows are sincerely spoken that marriage is not begun in sin The occasion may have been a sin ful act, which must be confessed but the marriage is certainly no begun in sin.

Now if it is true that a second marriage, begun in sin, as is true in the case of remarriage after unbiblical divorce, constitutes a sinful relationship, then our procedure with those who are contemplating such a marriage will be much different from that of the above mentioned position, which considers only the act of marrying sin and not the relationship. A

consistory will point out that more than an act is involved. On the basis of Synod's decision, that consistory might also be in duty bound to declare that only the transforming grace of Christ, revealed in the whole of the life of this marriage, can make it holy matrimony. But that it is a sinful, and, no doubt, adulterous relationship is without question. And hence there will be immediate and extreme discipline if such marriage is contracted.

Continuing along that same line, there will also be a difference when it comes to receiving such parties into the church when repentance is in evidence. Dr. G. Stob takes issue with the Synod for demanding a probationary period prior to official reception in the church. This somewhat surprizes us. If only the transforming grace of Christ, revealed in the whole of the marriage relationship, can make this relationship holy, should not the church ask for sufficient time to become reasonably satisfied that such transformation has actually taken place? After all this is a very serious matter.

Nor can this be compared with any other sin. For here we are not confronted with a mere sin but a sinful relationship. To confess the sin involved is only one aspect of the situation. Evidence must be on hand that the whole relationship to marriage and within marriage is changed. To say that a consistory does not need the advice of Classis when it deals with a penitant thief or murderer and hence ought not to be chained to the Classis for advice here, is hardly fair. Much more is involved than a sinful act. And what is involved concerns the welfare of the whole church in a different sense than when dealing with specific sins such as theft and murder.

Synod has made a decision. It is called the new position. But Synod will have to say much more before the church can have peace in this matter. Perhaps what Synod has said is really very little and that the most important things are still to be decided.

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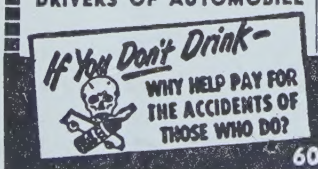


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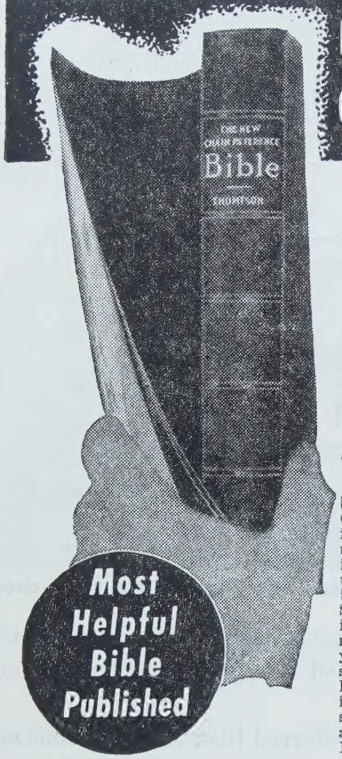


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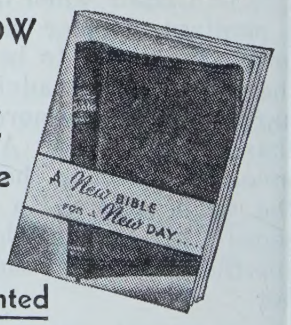


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